

"If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

Aspen Daily News

'Delicate, playful and pretty'

Tuesday, January 10, 2023

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Coming to The Arts Campus At Willits on Saturday is the Americana roots quartet Birds of Play.

Known for their soulful lyrics and fluid musicality, the Colorado group is currently on tour and will be making its TACAW debut. Opening for Birds of Play on Saturday will be Carbondale-based bluegrass outfit The Red Hill Rollers. The show starts at 8 p.m. (doors open at 7 p.m.) and limited seating is available.

Birds of Play lead singer and songwriter Alex Paul described his band's sound as "delicate, playful and pretty." He said a lot of storytelling comes into play when performing live and he looks forward to sharing that experience with the Roaring Fork Valley.

"We write songs that are really soulful and meaningful — you know, a lot of our inspiration comes from the land we inhabit and the communities we're immersed in," Paul said. "And the response to the music seems to be that that deep kind of soulful approach to our songwriting and craft is met and appreciated."

While the idea for the band had been circulating for quite some time, Birds of Play was born about four years ago and began as a three-man group. Paul — who also plays guitar, mandolin and bass and was previously part of another band



The Americana roots band Birds of Play is pictured during a performance. The Colorado-based quartet will be appearing at The Arts Campus At Willits on Saturday. Photo by Sarah Schwab

based out of Durango — formed Birds of Play with his friends, Jack Tolan and Eric Shedd, after he won a solo competition at the 2018 Telluride Blues and Brews Festival.

Included in the prize package was a guaranteed performance slot at the following year's festival. This opportunity arose around the same time in which Paul had also received a grant from the Telluride Arts District to record an album.

"All of a sudden, I had this album funding and this festival slot," Paul said. "I had a little bit of incentive to finally get this band idea together — you know, with a goal to work towards and something to create."

And so Paul, Tolan and Shedd came together to record their

first album, "Anthrophony," before ever having played a show, Paul said. The trio started touring soon after, picking up momentum in the year leading up to the 2019 Telluride Blues and Brews Festival.

It was a fun foundation upon which to build, Paul said, and Birds of Play only continued to grow in the years that followed. The band became a foursome in 2020 with the addition of Anneke Dean — a classically trained violinist who has been playing the instrument since she was 8. She holds a degree in violin performance from the Chicago College of Performing Arts.

"I'm really proud of how we've

built the band without really any external help; we've done fundraising campaigns and have been creative about how to make this work," Paul said. "It's been a slow grassroots, community-building experiment, and now being four years into it, it feels like we're closer and closer to being able to do this sustainably for a bunch of years to come."

Birds of Play has released three studio albums and looks to record a fourth at the end of the month, Paul said. The musician explained that both by design and circumstance, it's difficult to place Birds of Play within a specific genre. He noted how the four band members all come from different musical backgrounds and what they each bring to the mix complements one another nicely.

"It's hard to genre what we do because everyone has such a different musical upbringing," Paul said. "And we don't want to be pigeonholed into being a bluegrass band or a folk band or a blues band because we've got all of these influences from all over the world and try to allow them to flourish as best they can."

Paul said he considers Telluride generally to be a home base for his band, noting that many of the songs originated in the southwest Colorado mountain town. But the Birds of Play musicians have never all actually lived in the same place, he said.

The quartet has a number of different hubs throughout Colorado and the Western Slope — the Roaring Fork Valley being one of them, as Tolan grew up in Glenwood Springs and the band will frequently visit the valley to rehearse or play gigs, Paul said. He mentioned how Birds of Play has

performed often at Steve's Guitars and True Nature in Carbondale and also at the Beyul Retreat.

"We all have a lot of community around the Roaring Fork Valley, but particularly in Carbondale and Glenwood — that's been kind of our second home," Paul said. "And one of the things I'm most looking forward to is to share the evening with The Red Hill Rollers, I think it's a really awesome pairing and I can't think of a more special place to do our first show together."

Paul went on to state that Birds of Play is not a party band and that while the quartet plays some bar shows and likes performing higher energy events here and there, the band's favorite places to play are listening rooms — "where people are really immersed in the music willing to let us take them on a journey," Paul said.

TACAW's theater room is perfectly suited to the kind of vibes for which Birds of Play is aiming, added Paul. Though Saturday's show will mark the musician's first time performing at the Basalt venue, Paul mentioned that he's seen a show in the space before and is thrilled to get to perform in a room so conducive to the music that his band creates.

"You know, we want to play rooms that suit the music that we want to share with people and have that be responded to positively," Paul said.

Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 on the day of the show. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit tacaw.org.